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Government IT

Tom Jarrett
Delaware Secretary of Technology, CIO
Thursday, September 30, 2004; Noon ET

Tom Jarrett, the new president of the [National Association of State Chief Information Officers](#) will be online Thursday, Sept. 30, at Noon ET to discuss challenges facing state government information technology officials. Jarrett is Delaware's secretary of technology and chief information officer.

[Filter](#) columnist Cynthia L. Webb will moderate the discussion.

[Submit your questions](#) before or during Thursday's discussion.



Tom Jarrett

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Washington Post Online Chat With Tom Jarrett, CIO Delaware and President of the National Association of State Chief Information Officers. Thursday, September 30, 2004.

Cynthia L. Webb: NASCIO recently had its convention in New Orleans. What issues were identified as the most pressing by other state CIOs in attendance? Is there a plan to organize all the states to deal with these issues or is it up to each state to deal with their own IT problems? **Tom Jarrett:** Some of the most pressing issues are around Privacy and security. Security plays so closely to Homeland security that it is on everyone's mind. As an organization, NASCIO acts to bring our issues together and supports each of us in addressing the issues we have identified.

Baltimore: Are there any changes in IT acquisition procedures at the federal level that you think should be copied by the states?

Tom Jarrett: None that I am directly aware of but much work is going on to bring better linkage between the states and the feds on purchasing issues. This will allow for a lot more efficiencies for everyone.

Arlington, VA: What is your organization doing to contribute to Homeland Defense against terrorism? How vulnerable are our systems - especially SCADA controls - to malicious hacking?

Tom Jarrett: NASCIO works closely with the Department of Homeland security on issues of cyber security and in Delaware we have been working with our largest companies on issues around SCADA control issues. The key here is close collaboration between the feds and the states on these kinds of issues.

Falls Church, VA: CIO's seem to be present more and more in discussions

about our own security during emergencies. What role do you see State's playing in keeping the public informed when emergencies take place? Or is all of this on the plate of Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge?

Tom Jarrett: I believe the states play the key role in informing citizens about emergencies. Our role is to bring technology solutions to the table that will allow people to gain access to the important info they will require if an emergency occurs.

Reston: How are technology budgets affecting the states? Are most state CIO's working on cutting costs? **Cynthia L. Webb:** Tom, this is a good question. With budget shortfalls, what are some creative ways that state CIOs are funding projects? Can you give us some examples from Delaware?

Tom Jarrett: CIO's in all the states are faced with budget issues. Here in Delaware we now require that all projects have a business case and is then reviewed by my organization and through a independent Tech council we have established. We are also looking at many other funding possibilities that we never really focused on before.

Dallas, TX: Are there efforts in progress to establish best practices around integration strategies (Enterprise Integration Architectures vs point to point interfaces) for application to application communications?

Are there similar efforts to discuss best practices regarding single-suite concepts vs. management of multiple application environments for large enterprises?

Tom Jarrett: The issue of Enterprise Architecture has evolved over the last several years and has become a key issue for everyone at both the state and federal level. NASCIO works closely with the federal government and private companies to drive this approach in everything we do. NASCIO also helps us

bring together best practices to deal with our application environments.

Cynthia L. Webb: On open source, are most states still using Windows-based operating systems and other proprietary-based software for their IT operations or have Linux and other often cheaper open-source software been on the rise in state agencies as budgets get tighter? **Tom Jarrett:** I think the driver here is cost. All the states are feeling the pinch and Open source is a direction that I believe we need to at least explore. In Delaware we are Windows based but do use Linux and are beginning to look at other options. In the end it is about getting the best solution at the best value for the taxpayers.

Arlington, Va.: You talked about a focus on privacy and security. Is that essential to convince Delaware residents to conduct business online -- saving the state \$\$?

Tom Jarrett: It is very important if people are to feel comfortable in going online to use our technology. Everyone is concerned about Identity Theft and this will be critical going forward.

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D.C.: It wasn't that long ago that the position of "chief information officer" at the state or federal level didn't exist at all. How has the CIO role at the state level evolved over the past decade? Are legislatures actually empowering these officers with appropriate statutory language?

Tom Jarrett: The CIO position has grown a great deal over the last several years. It is important that they are empowered to the work that needs to be done and it should be placed in appropriate language in a states code. In Delaware the Governor and legislature are extremely supportive of my role and did put the responsibilities in our code.

Cynthia L. Webb: We have 30 minutes left in our chat with Tom. Readers, thanks for your great input. Keep your questions coming. Thanks!

Reston, VA: NASCIO has been more visible in recent years on Capitol Hill. What is the NASCIO federal agenda for this year?

Tom Jarrett: The Federal agenda will focus on many areas but several of the key ones will be around privacy and security. This has such a huge impact for all the states that we need to remain focused on the Congress is doing in these areas. As we all know, this agenda will be dynamic to meet new challenges that come up as well.

Cynthia L. Webb: Tom, you mentioned the important role states play in keeping citizens informed during an emergency. The 9-11 terrorist attacks made it clear, however, that a lot of communication is impossible when power is down, etc.

Can you provide some specifics of progress that has been made in improving emergency communications, such as enhancing radio frequencies to better communicate information?

Tom Jarrett: The states and NASCIO have been involved with DHS on issues around communication interoperability. We all know what happened on 9/11 and we need to

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continue to work on having a seamless approach to this kind of communication

Cynthia L. Webb: Have you been in touch with your counterpart in Florida? The state has been slammed by hurricanes and the state's IT operations have surely been tested. Have you had any indications of how the state's CIO has helped state officials disseminate information?

Tom Jarrett: I have not been in touch with my counterpart in Florida given they are very busy but I hope to do that after they have had a change to slow down because they can share great ideas with us on what to do and what not to do. Let's let them get things under control first.

Cynthia L. Webb: In reference to an earlier question, SCADA stands for "Supervisory Control and Data acquisition."

Arlington VA: How hard is it to perennially under funded state governments to devote necessary resources to information operations? It seems in some states (not mine thankfully) technology improvements take a backseat to everything.

Tom Jarrett: This is an issue for many states. Unfortunately many still look at technology as an expense and not as a way to bring value for cost savings, etc. One of the things I focus on a lot is educating key leaders on what technology does and can do for them without getting into the "technical" side of things. We have been very successful in this effort. The right education will bring us a long way.

Cynthia L. Webb: What privacy issues in particular are at the top of the list for CIOs? Are we talking about complying with federal mandates like the Patriot Act or basic principles of protecting citizen data as more services go online? What is a common concern that you hear from citizens about their data being digitized?

Tom Jarrett: I think we have to look at both. At the state level we are most concerned about protecting the data that citizens give to us everyday. I have not had any citizens really express a

concern about data being digitized. It seems they are just concerned that someone can't gain access to what they are giving us.

Niceville, Florida: We are primarily a contractor to federal government agencies. Federal agencies always want to purchase software using a perpetual license model. We have been talking to the State of Florida and they now seem to prefer annual renewable licenses because of their lower upfront costs. Is this a growing trend within state governments?

Tom Jarrett: I think the whole issue of licenses is something we are all dealing with. What we find as the driver here is most decision makers really don't understand why we keep paying for these year after year and I get asked all the time why we can't just pay once and be done with it. We look at all our options and use the approach that gives us the best value.

Cynthia L. Webb: Here is a link to more information on Tom's background: <https://www.nascio.org/aboutNascio/pr/files/delaware.cfm>

Alexandria, Va.: Are any states considering pooling their purchasing power to win discounts on software and other IT acquisitions? Seems like Delaware and other "small" states would have a lot to gain by doing that.

Tom Jarrett: This is an approach that we are looking at. I believe this holds great potential, especially for a state like ours that doesn't have the same buying power as a state like Penn.

Germantown, MD: It is very important that people feel comfortable going online to use our technology. Everyone is concerned about identity theft and this will be critical going forward. Here in Delaware, we are Windows based. These seem like contradictory statements, given the well-known security holes in Windows-based systems.

Tom Jarrett: We use Windows but we are very aggressive around our security. Microsoft gets a lot of the press since they are the major player in this area. This also makes them the major target. Doesn't mean we can't guard against those issues. We do that everyday.

Washington, D.C. : Sort of a local question. Does D.C. have the equivalent of a state CIO? If not, is that why our Internet services are so weak?

Tom Jarrett: I can only answer that DC does have a CIO. Can't speak to the other issue.

Annandale, Virginia: Tom, The Homeland Security Department has made a lot of noise about how it wants to build an information sharing network

with the states about terror threats. Where does that effort stand now, and what sorts of technological hurdles need to be overcome?

Tom Jarrett: Work is being done on this front but I think the biggest challenge will be around connectivity issues and getting everyone to think about this in a way that puts aside the thought that we can't do it because we are all "different" We really aren't different at all. We all serve the same customers.

Annapolis, Md.: How would you describe your working relationship with Delaware homeland security officials? Do you need to convince them of the importance of IT infrastructure protection? **Tom Jarrett:** We have an excellent relationship with our HS folks. The Governor has also made me a member our Homeland Security Council that oversees all our HS efforts.

Reston: What new trends do you see in the way of state government information technology? **Tom Jarrett:** This may be less of a technology response but one of the trends we see here is a change in "how" we address technology deployment. We take a much more business approach to insure that we are deploying technology that solves real business problems for our agencies.

Middletown, Del.: Good afternoon. I was intrigued to discover that we even have a state CIO in Delaware. I guess my first question is, your position sounds like it encompasses just about anything you can think of. What are the top three priorities of a state CIO? Not in the sense of structure, but in the sense of actual ISSUES (like terrorism, taxes, roads, communications, etc.)? Thanks.

Tom Jarrett: My first issue was to dissolve the original IT structure and rebuild it under a business model. Now that is done, we are focused on security of our systems and helping to bring real solutions to the agencies that serve the citizens everyday.

Arlington, VA: NASCIO talked about the role of the CIO in economic development at the recent conference. Do state CIOs really see this as part of their agenda?

Tom Jarrett: We do see it as part of our agenda but it will very much depend on how each state is handling economic Development. Here in Delaware I play a key role in our efforts and I know that is the case in many states as well. CIO's should be viewed as a key asset in this area.

Cynthia L. Webb: We are out of time for more questions today. Readers, thanks for your participation. Tom, thanks for taking time out of your day to talk about various challenges and priorities for state CIOs. We hope to have you online

again in the future for a status report on various efforts. Have a great day!

Tom Jarrett: I would like to thank the Washington Post for this opportunity and hope they will have me back again. I enjoyed it very much.

Tom
